

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1765

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 5007

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MILI, ES, HO

SUBJECT: HONDURAN CONCERNS REGARDING SLAVADORAN MILITARY INTENTIONS

BEGIN SUMMARY: RUMORS AGAIN HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING IN TEGUCIGALPA CONCERNING CLASHES ON THE BORDER. TO ALLAY PUBLIC FEARS, THE GOVERNMENT ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE STATING THAT NO CLASHES HAD TAKEN PLACE, AND THAT THE GOH HAD BEEN INFORMED BY DH SALVADORAN MILITARY AUTHORITIES THAT THEY HAD PLANNED TO CARRY OUT MAUVERS IN BORDER AREAS. SEVERAL HIGH-RANKING HONDURAN MILITARY LEADERS REITERATED TO MILGP OFFICERS ON NOVEMBER 12 THEIR GROWING CONCERN REGARDING SLAVADORAN ARMS PURCHASES AND POSSIBLE INTENTIONS TOWARD HONDURAS. WHATEVER THE REASON OR REASONS, THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT HONDURAN CONCERN ABOUT EL SALVADOR HAS ACQUIRAC A NEW URGENCY. END SUMMARY.

1. RUMORS HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING AGAIN IN TEGUCIGALPA CONCERNING ALLEGED CLASHES WITH EL SALVADOR, AND RADIO REPORTS STATED THAT EL SALVADOR WAS CONDUCTING MILITARY MANEUVERS ALONG THE FRONTIER. TO ALLAY PUBLIC CONCERN,
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THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE THAT APPEARED

IN THE PRESS ON NOVEMBER 13. THE MAIN POINTS FOLLOW:

- (A) THERE HAVE BEEN NO ARMED CLASHES;
- (B) EL SALVADOR HAS MOBILIZED TROOPS TO PARTICIPATE IN MANEUVERS IN THE EASTERN ZONE;
- (C) HONDURAS WAS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED OF THE MANEUVERS BY THE SALVADORAN ARMED FORCES;
- (D) THERE IS NO REASON FOR ALARM; AND
- (E) THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES ARE CARRYING OUT THEIR NORMAL DUTIES.

2. HOWEVER, SEVERAL HIGH-RANKING HONDURAN MILITARY OFFICERS SPOKE TO MILGP OFFICERS ON NOVEMBER 12 ABOUT THEIR GROWING CONCERN REGARDING SALVADORAN ARMS PURCHASES AND POSSIBLE INTENTIONS. LT. COLONEL DOMINGO ALVAREZ, AIR FORCE COMMANDER, TOLD ONE MILGP OFFICER THAT 7,000 SALVADORAN TROOPS WERE CURRENTLY MANEUVERING ON HONDURAS' BORDER. HE ALSO SAID THAT THE A-37S LOCATED AT SAN PEDRO SULA HAD BEEN ARMED AND TEMPORARILY PLACED ON ALERT. IN A SEPARATE TALK WITH A DIFFERENT MILGP OFFICER, LT. COLONEL CESAR ELVIR SIERRA, ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF, INDICATED THAT THERE IS INCREASING HONDURAN CONCERN ABOUT SALVADORAN ARMS PURCHASES AND POSSIBLE INTENTIONS REGARDING HONDURAS. HE REMARKED THAT HONDURAS NEEDED TO ACQUIRE ADDITIONAL ARMS TO CONFRONT THE SALVADORAN BUILDUP, AND EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION ABOUT THE SLOWNESS OF US ARMS DELIVERIES. THE G-4, LT. COLONEL AMILCAR CASTILLO, IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION WITH THE SAME OFFICER, REITERATED WHAT ELVIR HAD SAID.

3. BEGIN COMMENT: IT IS UNCLEAR WHY THE HONDURAN MILITARY LEADERSHIP SENSES A GREATER DANGER IN THE SITUATION AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME. THERE HAS BEEN A PERSISTENT BELIEF ON THE PART OF HONDURAN MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LEADERS THAT EL SALVADOR IS PURCHASING MORE ARMS IN AN ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN A CLEAR MILITARY SUPERIORITY OVER HONDURAS. THIS BELIEF IS FIRMLY ROOTED IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPRECIATION OF EL SALVADOR AS THE AGGRESSOR NATION THAT INVADDED HONDURAN TERRITORY IN 1969 AND THAT SHE WOULD DO SO AGAIN IF THE PROPER OPPORTUNITY PRESENTS ITSELF. IF A VERY BASIC SENSE, THIS PSYCHOLOGICAL PREDISPOSITION CAN BE COUNTED ON TO CAUSE THE HONDURAN LEADERSHIP TO EVALUATE THE INTELLIGENCE THEY RECEIVE ABOUT

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EL SALVADOR IN THE WORST POSSIBLE LIGHT. IN THAT REGARD, THE HONDURAN INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM IS WOEFULLY INADEQUATE AND THE REPORTS IT PRODUCES ARE NOT "FINISHED" PRODUCTS, BUT RATHER A COLLATION OF RAW MATERIAL FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES. OBVIOUSLY, SUCH A SYSTEM IS MADE TO ORDER FOR FALSE OR EXAGGERATED DEDUCTIONS WHICH FEED HONDURAN PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT SALVADORAN MOTIVATIONS. THERE MAY WELL BE A DESIRE ON

THE PART OF HONDURANS TO EXAGGERATE PURPOSELY THE THREAT FROM EL SALVADOR IN THE HOPE OF RECEIVING FASTER ARMS DELIVERIES FROM THE US; HOWEVER, THIS SEEMS UNLIKELY GIVEN THEIR CONSTANT PREOCCUPATION OVER AN EXTENDED TIME ABOUT SALVADORAN ARMS PURCHASES. THE RECENT SALVADORAN REJECTION OF THE HONDURAN OAS PEACE INITIATIVE COULD WELL BE A FACTOR IN THE STEPPING UP OF THE LEVEL OF CONCERN OVER THE SITUATION. WHATEVER THE CAUSE OR CAUSES, THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT HONDURAN CONCERN ABOUT EL SALVADOR HAS ACQUIRED A NEW URGENCY AT THE PRESENT TIME.

4. WITHOUT AN ADEQUATE INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM THE HONDURANS ARE GUIDED BY THEIR PROECONCEPTIONS, PREJUDICES, RUMORS AND SUSPICIONS. THE DANGER IS NOT THAT THEY MIGHT TAKE THE OFFENSIVE MILITARILY (THEY LACK THAT CAPACITY) BUT THAT THEY MIGHT MISTAKE OR MISINTERPRET SALVADORAN ACTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THESE SUSPICIONS AS PRELUDES TO A NEW SALVADORAN ATTACK TO WHICH THEY MUST REACT. IF LT. COL. ALVEREZ'S STATEMENT THAT THE AIR FORCE HAS RECENTLY ARMED AND ALERTED ITS A-37S IN RESPONSE TO SALVADORAN MANEUVERS IS CORRECT, THE ESCALATING DANGERS IN THIS SITUATION ARE READILY APPARENT. THE MORE IMMEDIATE RESULT IS THAT THE HONDURANS ARE BEING PANICKED INTO EXTENSIVE AND, TO OUR MIND, QUESTIONABLE ARMS PURCHASES.

5. THE EMBASSY IS NOT IN A POSITION TO JUDGE THE ACCURACY OF THE HONDURAN CHARGES OF EXCESSIVE ARMS PURCHASES AND BORDER MANEUVERS ON THE PART OF EL SALVADOR. TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY ARE TRUE, THEY CAN ONLY EXACERBATE A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SITUATION. A MEANINGFUL GESTURE ON THE PART OF THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT TO REASSURE THE HONDURANS ON THESE POINTS WOULD CERTAINLY BE TIMELY AND MIGHT REVERSE THE PRESENT TREND. WE RECOGNIZE THAT SOME ACTIONS OR OMISSIONS

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ON THE PART OF THE HONDURAN AUTHORITIES MAY BE VIEWED FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER AS UNRESPONSIVE, TO SAY THE LEAST. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THESE SHOULD BE VIEWED AND JUDGED IN THE LIGHT OF THE STATE OF MIND (I.E. THAT HONDURAS IS THE AGGRIEVED AND THREATENED PARTY) WHICH PERVADES HONDURAN OPINION, BOTH OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE. IN ANY CASE, PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY HIGH SALVADORAN OFFICIALS HAVE NOT SUCCEEDED IN ALLAYING HONDURAN APPREHENSIONS. A RESUSCITATION OF THE BORDER MEETINGS BETWEEN THE TWO MILITARY (WE UNDERSTAND THESE HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY LESS FREQUENT AND EFFECTIVE) MIGHT BE ONE USEFUL AVENUE, PARTICULARLY IF THEY WERE AT THE GENERAL STAFF LEVEL. THE DEPARZMENT MIGHT WISH TO AUTHORIZE BOTH EMBASSIES TO DISCREETLY URGE SUCH TALKS UPON THE HOST GOVERNMENT.

6. THE EMBASSY WONDERS TOO IF A USEFUL ROLE COULD BE DEVISED FOR THE COMMITTEE OF SEVEN IN THIS SUTUATION IF ITS TERMS OF REFERENCE PERMIT. THE SITUATION BETWEEN EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS STRONGLY SUGGESTS THAT GREATER USE OF THE COMMITTEE OUGHT TO BE CONSIDERED RATHER THAN ITS DISBANDMENT (STATE TB 268702), ALTHOUGH BORGONOVO'S REPLY TO THE RECENT HONDURAN INITIATIVE IN THE COMMITTEE OF SEVEN APPEARS TO RULE OUT ALL BUT BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS. ON THE LARGER ISSUE OF A GENERAL SETTLEMENT, FONMIN BORGONOVO AND ADVISER TO THE CHIEF OF STATE BATRES, AS A RESULT OF THEIR RECENT TALKS IN GUATEMALA, ARE PRESUMABLY ENGAGED IN SOUNDING OUT THEIR RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS AS TO THE FEASIBILITY OF A RESUMPTION OF DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS BASED ON THE BORGONOVO-BATRES FORMULA OF LATE 1974. IF THESE NEGOTIATIONS DO NOT MATERIALIZE OR FAIL, THE IMPACT ON THE SITUATION DESCRIBED ABOVE WILL BE ADVERSE, UNLES OTHER MEANS CAN BE FOUND TO REASSURE THE HONDURANS REGARDING SALVADORAN INTENTIONS. END COMMENT.

7. THE EMBASSY WOULD WELCOME COMMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY SAN SALVADOR ON THESE PREMISES.
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